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SUBJECT: KOZULINAS DESCRIBE PRESSURE ON PRISONER FATHER

REF: VILNIUS 220

¶1. (SBU) Charge and A/DCM met April 10 with Olga and Yuliya Kozulina, the daughters of former presidential candidate and political prisoner Aleksandr Kozulin. The Charge briefly informed the Kozulinas that the Embassy was under increasing pressure from the Belarusian authorities but that both Belarusian and American officials were seeking a diplomatic solution. Charge assured the Kozulinas that no matter what happens, human rights, democracy, the fate of their father and of all political prisoners in Belarus would remain priorities of the United States. The Kozulinas thanked the USG and the Embassy for their tireless advocacy on their father's behalf. Olga Kozulina said that her father has never forgotten the USG's intervention at the UN Security Council on his behalf during a hunger strike, and often says he "owes his life" to the United States.

Kozulin Under Increasing Pressure in Penal Colony

¶2. (SBU) Olga and Yuliya Kozulina told Charge that their father faced increasing pressure in the penal colony in which he is detained. They said that he was under both video and audio surveillance and the pressure he faced was aggravating problems with his blood pressure. Olga Kozulina said that the one thing her father wants is for the EU to follow the U.S. example and impose serious economic sanctions. She understands that it is highly unlikely, but in Olga's estimation, if the EU were to join the U.S. on economic sanctions the Lukashenko regime would have no choice but to change its policy.

¶3. (SBU) Olga Kozulina added that Russian pressure -- should it be forthcoming -- could also lead to a change in Belarusian policy on political prisoners. She admitted to Charge, however, that she had no contact with the Russians, and, in fact, had even been turned away when she had attempted to present their Embassy with a letter for President Putin calling for the release of her father.

[Comment: We had heard previously that the Russian Embassy cut all contact with Aleksandr Kozulin's family after his arrest in March ¶2006. End comment.]

Olga, A UDF candidate, Describes Lack of Activity

¶4. (SBU) Olga, a candidate on the UDF's unified slate for September 2008 parliamentary elections representing Belarusian Social Democratic Party-Gramada (BSDP-G), said that there were opposition politicians both inside and outside the UDF that wanted the unified list to fall apart. She said that a UDF training session for candidates planned for April 7 in Vilnius had been postponed until

May or June, adding that she was aware of little, if any, formal preparation for the UDF campaign. In answer to Charge's question, she said that she knew nothing of her father's former counsel Sergey Skrebets and his Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada's plan to launch their own slate of candidates (reftel). She attributed such a move, and the formation of other lists like it, to a desire by candidates to claim the paltry USD 300 to 400 that the GOB offers to registered candidates for campaign materials. Both Yuliya and Olga emphatically stated that they preferred to discuss their father's plight directly with post, rather than through Skrebets or other intermediaries. Charge confirmed that the USG would view them, and not others, as their father's representatives.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) While raising the level of attention paid by the international community (especially the EU) remains important, it is evident that the democratic opposition needs to increase its coordination as well. The existence of multiple slates will dilute the opposition vote, and both highlights the disunity of the pro-democracy forces and plays directly into the hands of the regime.

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